

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

# ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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## WHAT HE COST HER.

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"HALVES," &c.

### CHAPTER X. A VISIT TO THE PRISONERS.

THERE had been not a few rows at "the shop" in its time: its natural atmosphere was of that character that could only be cleared by storms; but there had never been such a row as that Charlton Fair row. It would have been difficult, as in another world-famous locality, to find twenty righteous, or even ten, in the place, during periods of commotion: so many were tarred with the same brush of insubordination. But upon the present occasion there was absolutely no one who could plead "Not guilty," save some half-dozen gentlemen-cadets who had the great good fortune to be in hospital, though, of course, among those were not included Messrs. Bright and Jefferson, the very belli teterima causa—"the beggars who started the whole thing," as the unclassical Landon expressed it. It was perfectly understood, too, that these immaculate half-dozen would have joined the rest of the rioters, had they but had the opportunity; so that it seemed absurd, even to the authorities themselves, to raise them to the extreme pinnacle of promotion—as must needs be the case if all the others should be depressed, or still more suppressed—in reward for an indisposition which was purely physical. Moreover, if all these gentlemen-cadets were expelled en masse, what would become of the corps of the Royal Engineers and of the Artillery, to which the Military Academy was, as it were, the feeder? It was usual enough

for promotion to be impeded at the other end of the military career, but stagnation at the commencement would be fatal. Doubtless the more sagacious of the juniors took this fact into their consideration when they entered into revolt with so light a heart, foreseeing that, whatever havoc authority should make among the ring-leaders, they, the mere rank and file, must rather benefit than otherwise, and could in no case be themselves obliterated from the muster-roll of their country's heroes.

But in respect to the old cadets, or old offenders—for the words were unhappily synonymous in those days—matters looked very black. Authority long contemned had been in this instance placed so publicly at defiance, that it was necessary that examples should be made. The only question was how many examples? The authorities were by no means in a hurry to come to a decision, for the matter was really momentous; and perhaps they took into account that delay, since it involved suspense, would in itself be no light punishment to the culprits. And in the meantime the "poor young gentlemen," as Ella called them, were confined to their barracks.

Forbidden to "walk up and down" the outside world, after the manner of the Father of Evil, they were obliged to content themselves with tormenting the poor "neuxes" within their boundaries; and thus, if they did not repent of their disobedience themselves, they at least caused others to repent of it.

Landon, however, to do him justice, was not one to bully anybody for the sake of bullying, whatever pain he inflicted out of "gaiety of heart;" and he and Darall were pacing the parade-ground together on the afternoon succeeding the expedition

to the fair, engaged in serious talk. That Darall should be depressed was natural, under the circumstances, but it seemed to his friend that his melancholy was out of proportion to his peril.

"Come, old fellow, you take too gloomy a view of this affair," said he; "if you are to be lost to the service through yesterday's escapade, what sinner of us all is to be saved?"

"It is not only this row, and its consequences, that is troubling me," returned the other, kicking the pebbles away as he spoke; "I am altogether out of humour with my lot in life; it seems so devilish hard, somehow, to be so poor."

"Harder than it seemed yesterday, do you mean, old fellow?" inquired Landon slyly.

"Well, yes, it does seem harder. Of course it is very foolish to entertain such regrets, but when I think of those nice girls we met yesterday afternoon——"

"Steady, steady, my good friend; you must not think of both of them; besides, one of them is copyright."

"Well, when I think of that nice girl that I met yesterday, so sweet, and modest, and good-humoured, and reflect that I am so situated that I shall never, in all human probability, be in a position to ask her to become my wife——"

"Never is a long day, Hugh," interrupted his friend, laughing; "and in due time, when you have got your company, you will meet with another girl just like her."

"There is none like her—none!" exclaimed Darall passionately.

"My poor Hugh, is it indeed so bad as that, then?" said Landon, pityingly. "I had no idea you were so smitten."

"Well, of course I have no right to be, as though I were a fellow like yourself, who has money at his back, and is his own master," returned Hugh, bitterly. "I was a fool even to talk about it; but you will do me the justice to say that I at least never dreamt of calling upon Miss Ray, or of writing a letter to her."

"My dear Hugh, there is no reason in the world why you should not call, except that you can't leave the barracks; and as to my writing to Miss Mayne, I should not have dreamt of doing so, save to excuse myself from not calling, which I had promised to do. By the time I am my own master, as you call it—that is, when I am informed that the Queen has no more occasion for my services—this girl will have probably forgotten all about me——"

By jingo! there they both are in that pony-carriage yonder."

"Where?" cried Darall, excitedly; "I only see an officer and a lady."

"Well, they are the colonel and Miss Mayne; you don't suppose the two girls would have called upon us alone, do you? See, they have stopped at the lodge, and the colonel is beckoning to us."

"He is beckoning to you, not to me," said Darall curtly, and as his companion ran off to the gateway, he turned to a group of old cadets who were engaged in hanging neuxes over the wall of the sunk fence by one arm, it is to be hoped with some scientific view of testing the power of endurance in the human muscle. In these days, when even the vivisection of animals is objected to, this practice would be called cruel, and Darall was so far ahead of his age as to hold it to be so.

"I tell you what, you fellows," said he, in a tone of remonstrance, "if Whymper drops"—for it was that unhappy young gentleman who was in process of suspension—"he'll break—his arrest."

His tormentors pulled him up in an instant. The idea of breaking his bones, or even his neck, would not have alarmed them, but to make him break his arrest, by being dropped out of the precincts of "the enclosure," would have been an inexpressible wrong indeed. The cultivation of truth—mainly, however, in connection with martial matters—was carried to such perfection at the Royal Military Academy, that other branches of morality suffered, just as a high-pressure mathematical system sometimes produces wranglers who can't spell. "Fiat justitia ruat cælum" was their second motto—"Ubique," it will be remembered, was their first—and its free translation was, "Break all the commandments, but not your word."

While Darall was thus playing the part of a Don Quixote in rescuing the oppressed, his friend Landon was following his instincts, and making himself agreeable to his Dulcinea. Their meeting—considering it was watched afar by at least fifty gentlemen-cadets, who had fixed their gaze upon the charming Ella with as great unanimity as though they had received the military direction of "Eyes right"—was singularly free from embarrassment. Mr. Cecil Landon was gifted with that very necessary attribute of a warrior—presence of mind; and Ella had no eyes except for him.

"I am very sorry, Mr. Landon," said she, "and so is my uncle, to hear that you are in such trouble."

"Yes, sir," said the colonel, grumpily, "we are both devilish sorry."

"I only hope," she went on with a charming smile, "that your present position is not in any way owing to your gallant behaviour with respect to Miss Ray and myself."

"No, indeed," replied Landon, "though even if it were so, I should consider it to be paying very cheaply for what was a great pleasure."

"I believe the whole lot of you will be expelled," observed the colonel, confidently; he hated compliments to women—unless they were paid by himself.

"Well, indeed, sir, I hope not, for my friend's sake. It is not of much importance, in my own case, one way or the other."

"By jingo, if I were Sir Hercules, I would make it of importance to every man Jack of you. The idea of the Cadet Company acting contrary to orders——"

"My dear uncle," interrupted Ella, "pray remember that however awful that crime may be, the commission of it was the cause of your niece being rescued from a most disagreeable situation. That is surely Mr. Darall I see yonder; is it possible he means to cut me?"

"By no means," said Landon; "but the fact is, he is very diffident."

"Diffident?" chuckled the colonel. "Do you mean to say that the fellow is shy? I should like to see that *lusus nature*, a shy cadet, a little nearer."

Whereupon Landon, laughing, beckoned to his friend to come to the gate, and the colonel, getting out of the pony-carriage, advanced to meet him, leaving the young people alone.

"Darall is afraid to renew his acquaintance with you, Miss Mayne," said Landon, in quick, soft tones, "for fear it should be the means of reintroducing him to your friend, Miss Ray; he is very susceptible, and yet he feels, poor fellow, that further knowledge of her would only lead to disappointment."

"On her side, or his, I wonder?" argued Ella, with a touch of scorn which became her admirably; she was one of those women whose beauty is heightened by piquancy of that sort, whereas Gracie's looks would have suffered from it.

"Of course, upon his side," said Landon; "though I must be allowed to say of

Darall that he is worthy of any woman's gracious regard."

"Dear me, Mr. Landon; that is saying a great deal for another gentleman—who is himself so very diffident, too."

"Well, that is the very reason," answered the other, laughing; "since he will never say so much upon his own account."

"I am afraid you are not diffident, Mr. Landon."

"I don't think I am quite so shy as Darall," answered Landon, demurely.

"Nor, let us hope, quite so susceptible?"

"That is true; I am not so easily enraptured; but when it does happen—and it has only happened once—then I feel it very much indeed," and the young gentleman heaved a little sigh.

The colour rose in Ella's cheek, though she strove to suppress it. There could surely be no doubt as to the one instance of which he spoke, and it was very pleasant to hear him express such sentiments.

"Do you think it will be really injudicious of me to speak of your friend to Miss Ray, Mr. Landon? I am sure she would naturally wish to see and thank him—as I confess I did in your case—for his chivalrous behaviour of yesterday; but if it is certain—that is, I mean if his circumstances are so adverse, and he has really allowed himself to think seriously of her, upon so very short an acquaintance——"

"I don't think time has much to do with liking," observed Landon, with a philosophic air; "one sees an exquisite landscape, for instance, it may be only for once, but its peculiar charm is never forgotten; a thousand beautiful scenes may in their time present themselves, but they fade away from the mind, while that particular one abides—remains for ever as the fairest."

"Just so," said Ella, flipping at a fly upon the pony's ear with her whip; "and if you grew more familiar with it, its charms would perhaps vanish."

"That would be your fault," answered Landon; "that is," added he, hastily, "my fault, I mean" (and here the consciousness of having said more than he had intended made his fluent tongue hesitate, while his voice grew very soft and low), "I mean that the true lover—whether of nature, or—or—of any other object—only grows the fonder, the more knowledge he has of that which charmed him at first."

"I think a landscape does grow upon one," said Ella, meditatively.

"And not only a landscape, believe me, Miss Mayne; if the opportunity is only afforded—"

Ella was glad to turn her eyes from his handsome, eager face, and fix them upon Darall, whom the colonel had now brought up to the side of the carriage.

"Here is the *lusus*," said he, "the prodigy, the one and only specimen of the 'shy cadet' that has appeared since the Academy was founded."

"Then there was no such thing in your time, it appears, uncle?" said Ella.

"No, by gad, there wasn't," said the colonel, confidently; "but, on the other hand, we had not the impudence to break the standing orders."

"Were my uncle and I so very formidable, Mr. Darall, that you were afraid to come near us?" asked Ella, smiling. "We only came to thank you for your gallant service of yesterday."

"I did not think it was worth your thanks, Miss Mayne," answered Darall, blushing to the very roots of his hair.

Landon and Ella regarded him with amused interest. Not a word had these two young folks whispered, be it observed, of a common flame; but they had hinted of it in the case of others, and this is as sure a method of making love as there is. It was astonishing what way they had made with one another, thus indirectly, and under cover of sympathy for their respective friends.

"Oh, that was the reason, was it, Mr. Darall? I assure you that is not my opinion, nor that of my friend Miss Ray, whom I am just about to visit. She will be sorry to hear that you hold our adventure so lightly. Her notion is that we were rescued from a barbarous rabble by two brave knights. I suppose I may tell her, at least, that you would have called to inquire after her if it had not been for your arrest?"

"Indeed, Miss Mayne, if that was my duty, pray excuse me to her upon the grounds you mention."

"If it was his duty! only listen to that, uncle; surely to call upon a rescued damsel the next morning is set down among the articles of war."

It was very hard of Ella to persecute the young man so; but then women are so hard—except when they are softer than butter.

"Let the poor lad alone," said the colonel, getting into the carriage, and taking the reins from his niece's hands;

"you'll make him deuced glad to be in arrest, and so far protected from these duties as you call them. It would be a mere compliment, under present circumstances, to ask you to dinner, gentlemen, else I am sure both myself and the commissary would be delighted to see you."

"Especially the commissary," said Ella, laughing.

"You are very good, colonel," said Landon; "but until this row has blown over, we cannot leave the enclosure, save to go to church," added he in a low tone, as he pressed Ella's hand.

At the same moment Darall saluted the colonel, who said, "Good-bye, young fellow, I'll not forget that little matter with Sir Hercules," and then the pony-carriage whirled away towards the town.

"My dear Ella, you don't object, I know, to my speaking my mind," observed the colonel, after a considerable silence.

"Not at all, uncle; I like people to speak out. But I warn you that, if your mind is set against Mr. Landon, your speaking it will be useless."

"You are still thinking seriously about that young man, then? I was in hopes, from your manner—and I must be allowed to add from his—that there was nothing likely to come of it."

Ella bit her lip, and her eyes flashed fire. This was the second time that her uncle had hinted that she was "throwing herself at Landon's head," and this time it had a sting in it, for she was conscious of having given him great encouragement. She was silent for more than a minute, and only just as they reached the Artillery Barracks, for which they were bound, inquired carelessly, "Well, uncle, and now for this bit of your mind."

"Nay, Ella, it is not now worth mentioning. Only, if those two young men had been equally indifferent to you—as I thought they were—"

"Well, uncle, let us suppose that to be the case, so as not to lose your valuable observation."

"I was about to remark, Ella," returned the colonel viciously, "that in my judgment Mr. Darall is worth at least a dozen of Mr. Landon."

"That will please Gracie very much, for she is quite of your opinion," returned Ella coolly, "so mind you tell her," and she waved her hand to the young lady in question, who was standing at her window as the pony stopped beneath it.



## A STRAW-PLAIT MARKET.

AT Hitchin, on every Tuesday throughout the year, and at the early hour of nine in the morning, there is held a straw-plait market. To it come ruddy women, bronzed and buxom, and keen-tongued women, and haggard women, and timid little girls, and sturdy old gossips and goodies; and they are to be seen trudging into Hitchin, past acres and acres of lovely lavender, delicious in rich colour and rich fragrance; along clean-clipped lanes bordered with ground-ivy, under old, old box-trees, the height of limes, the girth of cedars, as forked and as green-crustled; and they can be followed, carrying their links of plait upon their arms, as they pass close by the low-browed shops and the overhanging hostleries, and as they merge into the market-place, and take up their stand. They chatter resolutely whilst they wend their way, do these Herts women. Their homes are the warm-hued villages scattered round about, such as Baldock, Fisher's Green, Todd's Green, Red-cut Green, Hipplitz, Pollitz (if the spelling is too Saxon, it must be forgiven; it is local and colloquial), Much Wymondley, Little Wymondley, Willian, Score's Mill, Alsey, Nine Springs, Tibb's Bush, Water Dell; and, as real life is lived in these warm-hued villages—where cow-slips are still called cowpaigles, a lunch is a bever, a harvest-home is a lager-day; it follows that there is much news to be heard and told on these weekly market-meetings. There is no cessation of the chatter either, but only some abatement of its tone, when business is commencing and the market-place is reached.

It is the upper side of the largish square, which is the market-place of Hitchin, that is subject to the gradual but sure invasion of the sunburnt and voluble straw-plaiters. They occupy it—a few at first, but more as the minutes go on—till there are some hundreds of them in a loud cluster; and till they fashion themselves, roughly, but with pretty-clear intent, into three or four close double rows. Laden is each woman; and each woman in precisely the same manner. Their left arms are thrust through their coils, or links, of plait, if they have only as much as one arm will hold; both arms are thrust through, if they have more; and there the plait hangs, all round in front of them, like a capacious and very unwieldy muff. There are several sorts of plait. One sort is known as Devon, otherwise double; which means plaited with

as many as fourteen straws. One sort is single; plaited, in the most usual way, in seven. Another is whole; plaited (in seven) with unsplit straws, kept in their native round. Another sort, again, is twisted edge; with the distinction the name implies. But no matter what may be the value or variety, all are carried in bunches of ten yards long; all have a little tab, or end, of coloured print, tied on the string that binds up the whole, so that each plaiter may be able, after sale, to speak positively to her own. By the score is the plait sold, being two of the pieces ten yards long; the whole of the stock, of one sort, that each woman has, is implied in the purchase, division never being worth while; and the buyers (who are men from Luton, Dunstable, and elsewhere, where the plait is sewn up into hats and bonnets) walk between the close rows of women, looking for the sort of plait that suits their needs, and ascertaining the price at which it will be sold, with a large amount of skirmishing and rallery.

"Rough stuff, this!" was the cry of one of the men, contemptuously, the morning these matters were observed. "Rough as it can be! Whatever d'ye want for this rough lot?"

"Ten."

Monosyllabic, it will be seen; curt, peremptory. The woman addressed knew she was asking, according to rule, about a third more than she meant to take; knew she would have, in her own phraseology, to "sink." But she was firm, as she flung out her price; she was utterly unconciliatory.

The man was aware. "Give ye six," was his cunning proposition.

"That ye sha'nt!" was the vixenish rejoinder; with the plait tossed down sneeringly, with defiance among the neighbouring women, and the bargain at an end.

"Give ye six and a half for this," said another buyer to another plaiter, as he scrutinised her wares.

"No."

"Ye'll get no more. Better let me give it."

The woman blazed. "Why, that other man bid me seven!" she cried. "And I'll get ten and a half, or nothing! And I'll take good care I don't plait no more whole plaats for anybody! They cost me ten for the straws!"

That was a horrible—misrepresentation. "Straaws" were selling at an adjacent part of the market, a little lower down, at twopence and threepence a bundle (bundles

being those miniature sheaves seen in shop windows, the thickness two hands can span, and nine or ten inches high); and a bundle, it is well known to every plaiter, can always make two score yards of plait, or three, if it turn out at the best, and is used judiciously. However, "plait"-bidding seeming like love and war, with all things fair in the pursuance of it, the woman's statement passed unchallenged.

"Ye see," said another plaiter in explanation, "if the trade's brisk, ye have what ye ask;" and, as it was too early then, it may be supposed, to decide the trade was not brisk, the ask was high.

"What d'ye want?" cried a dealer, a few steps away. "Ye've got some fine rubbish here, I feel bound to tell ye!"

It was all to depreciate the value; but the woman was equal to the occasion. "Ye call it rubbish, do ye?" she shrieked. "Tain't ought to be, then! And I sha'nt sell it for rubbish price!"

"What'll ye take for it? Four?"

"Four? No! If I sell it for four next week, I won't sell it for less than six this!"

There was subtlety in the answer. It meant that the woman would take the plait home, without selling any of it at all; even if her punishment should be that she should have to bring it to market again, to get no more than the same money. A sister-plaiter also, near by, used the same dire threat, put into plainer terms.

"Ye sha'nt have it for eight," she cried, to the particular dealer cheapening her; "no! Not if I take it home again!"

"Tell ye what I'll give ye for this—nine and-a-half," was another method between another couple; with a tart "No! That ye won't!" of refusal from the seller, and a high look over the house-tops in resolution.

Then there was the astute buyer, who suggested: "Got any of these to give away like?" And there was the insinuating one, who said: "Come! Shall I have these two at seven, to begin with?" And there was the buyer who was joceuse, and who cried: "Ye want so much coaxing, Nan! Come, say yes! And I'll give ye a little drop of beer as well!" He being the same who said to another plaiter, a little farther on: "Ye won't take no notice of what I say, Bet, a bit! Listen, and let me mark it down!" And there were the buyers, too, who were not diplomatists, but went to their work direct, crying: "Why, this is all spotted!" and "Here's awful stuff?" and "See! 'Tain't worth nothing this,

except for dyeing!" and "If I give ye another farden, I'll eat my hat!"

"What!" cried a buyer, of some solidity and circumference, to a delightfully neat old plaiter, mushroom-hatted, as solid as he. "Thirteen! Plait must be well for ye to hope to get thirteen for this!"

Plait was well, apparently. At any rate, the old lady had no budging. She was bland and placid; with her "thirteen" placidly repeated.

"Give ye twelve," her antagonist suggested.

"No, ye sha'nt!" This sudden snap of an answer was a surprise to us, the old soul not looking capable of such quick determination.

It was a surprise, too, to the buyer, and completely overcame him. He scribbled a figure down on a small slip of paper without another instant of hesitation; he popped it into the old plaiter's disengaged hand; he silently passed down the row. She, meanwhile, glanced at the paper—silently, also. Then, her placidity returning, she gave the man a short nod of approval, and tucked the paper into her pocket—her sale accomplished.

Now, this slip-of-paper arrangement requires an explanation. All business was effected by means of it; every buyer carried a packet of the little pieces in his hand, and, when a woman had accepted a slip of paper with a figure written upon it, it was at once a sign that she had agreed to sell, and a guarantee of the price at which she would be paid. 'It would be too cumbersome—it can be readily understood—for a buyer to carry away his purchases; it would be too lengthy and too intricate for him to stop to pay for them; so the women kept their plait—still in its heavy bunches—and they all delivered it at appointed inns when the market had closed. There were a few exceptions to this at Hitchin. Two or three of the buyers were provided with an underling, to whom they carried the plait as they bought it, and who huddled it into huge white calico bags the size of sheets; but payment in these cases was to be on presentation of the slips of paper, exactly the same as in all the others. Indeed, all through all the sharp bidding and accepting, there was but one dealer who "settled" upon the spot. He was a young man, grave and anxious, to whom reckoning was new, at any rate, if not the paying for it; for when he had agreed to give "nine and a-half," and he found the

plaiter's bunch contained eight score, he was perfectly ignorant of how much it came to.

"Eight score at nine and a half," he said, with the plaiter as puzzled as he; so his only resource was a Ready Reckoner, the leaves of which he rapidly turned, and with whose dictum he was content to be content. "I'll give you five and nine," he cried, in a spirit of commercial amendment, no matter how deficient he might be of arithmetic; and when the woman was willing, and had handed him her plait, he pulled out his tan-dyed linen bag-purse, untied the strings of it, and gave over the amount.

But, "Angel; in good time," was the regular sort of appointment—was, in fact, said by one quiet buyer, as he handed a plaiter one of his slips of paper, and she took it with thorough comprehension.

"Swan; you know where," was the equally laconic speech of another.

Then there came, "Master Hawkes!" cried by a woman, anxious to get to the Angel, or the Swan, or somewhere; "give me your ticket for this bit of coarse. Come!"

It made Master Hawkes unlink the "bit of coarse" off the woman's arm, and look at it critically—not in the sun-glare, where it would all seem glossy and white enough, but in the shade he made by his own bent body, where "spots" or brown streaks in the straw could at once be recognised.

"Well," he said, as the result of his investigation, "I'll give ye a ticket, if ye like."

"What for?" demanded the woman, shrewdly.

"Eight and three-quarters."

"Eight and three-quarters!"

The tone of this repetition gave promise of a brisk battle to come, had not a sudden interruption put a stop to all further haggling and dealing. Right down upon the whole, across the market-place swiftly, there had swept a cloud; the cloud had grown darker instantaneously—was dropping heavily down the next instant upon those who bid, and those who took, and those who turned away, before they could scarcely be certain they had felt the first spot. The effect was striking. Where there had been a crowd of rustic plaiters, alert of speech, there was now—nothing; and the narrow streets that fed the market-place were being choked with woman after woman, as each one fled for shelter,

guarding her plait-links, as best she could, from the ruinous wet. Market was over, irrecoverably. Besides, there was the other work to do of paying, under a roof-top always; and surely the elements themselves had given the time of it, and it would be folly to be disputing. Wisdom would be in going whither the women were going, when the play would be brought to an end.

It was simply to the "Sun," or the "Swan," or the "Star;" where one of these erected its cross-beamed front above the footway, and had a wide, straight gap in it to let the wayfarers into its rough-stoned yard. Passing in, this "Sun," or "Swan," or "Star," gave glimpses of glass, and pewter, and bright snugness, as doors were knowingly placed ajar; allowed folks to find themselves amongst carts, and horses, pig-troughs, pumps, and clucking hens; with the way well indicated, by a passing line of plaiters, where, farther, it was necessary to go. A little room was the goal, away from all sign and symbol of the inn-traffic generally—a room, roughness itself, with sacking in one corner, with some unused tressels at the side; but, for the rest, the buyer's own, and given over to him, temporarily, for a counting-house. And there the buyer stood—himself on one side of a tressel-counter, a crowd of women on the other—with his cash-box open, ready to begin.

"Ticket?" was his demand constantly, and "How much money?" for he made the plaiters do their own multiplication. None were very sharp at it, and there always seemed a tangle in the talk when it came to calculating. The buyer knew it. Experience had taught him to be very definite about the change he wanted out of his sovereigns and half-sovereigns; and to put it so that there could be no error.

"It's five and eleven," he would insist, for instance, "and I want four and a penny. Four and a penny is what I want; have you got it?"

Perhaps the women had, when the gold would be given; perhaps the women hadn't, when they would be sent out, to be provided with it somehow, and were not to have the more valuable coin till they had come back.

The buyer was given to self-criticism too when the women handed his purchases in, and when he saw them by the light of the fact that he was going to pay.

"Did I give you seven for this rough

piece?" he cried; and, "Ye don't call this clear, do you? Why, ye've run all the spots in!" And, again, "If there comes a wet week, we shall lose money by all of these!" And, "I gave a good price for that piece, and a very good one! That I will say!"

In reply to all of which the women did battle, just as they had done before.

"Yer price is baad," they declared. "Sha'ant see my money again for my straws." "It's all one ghell's work, and as good as good." "Sha'ant do no more round work for anyone." "I ain't a going to sit and work haard, me and my ghells too, for nothing." "I can staand and lose one week, thank God; I ain't so baadly off as that." "Sha'ant sink threepence to please anybody: it's worth sixteen or it's worth nothing, and I won't let it go for thirteen." And, "That 'un! I couldn't plait that 'un if it were ever so! Though this woman says she'd sooner plait 'em than split 'em, and they may make it up as it is."

Poor women, it is no wonder they hung fire at elevenpence instead of a shilling, and rattled out voluble remonstrances at the suggestion of sixpences and sevenpences! To plait a score of yards of (medium) plait, four hours would be consumed; a woman could only plait forty yards a day, about twelve score of yards a week. If, then, she had sevenpence a score, and had given a penny for her "straaws," yielding her a profit of sixpence, at the week's end, with every hour used up for working, she would only have earned half-a-dozen shillings.

Do not let it be supposed, either, that plaiting is the only operation of plaiting; and that when nimble fingers have done twenty yards of pretty interlacing and interweaving, the twenty yards of plait are done. There are nine operations to add to it; not one of which can be omitted. These nine are, to sort, to cut off dead ends, to split, to mill, to wet, to clip, to mill again, to bunch, and to steam. Without entering into a minute description of any, it will be well, shortly, to give an account of each; and to begin with the first, the sorting. This is to pick out the straws that have any discolouring on them, and to lay them aside for inferior plait. If brown marks are overlooked, then the brown marks are "run in," the plait will not do for the best work, and the price goes down. Cutting off dead ends is to get rid of the dull and unsightly patches

that are on all the straws, if they have been taken from too near the root. To split, is to run a little machine through each straw, which narrows it into four, five, six, seven, or eight, available strips, according to how many little pins, or slitters, the machine has. These machines are little wooden tubes, about the size of a cedar pencil, with steel slitters at one end; they are sold in Hitchin market for twopence and threepence a piece. To mill, is to pass these split straws (or the whole ones, for the coarse plait) through heavy weights to take out their stiffness. To wet, is to dip the straws into water, to make them work more easily. Indeed, some plaiters wet their straws constantly in the mouth, and others keep a crock of water by them for frequent dipping; but it is disagreeable to have too much splash and damp, therefore the regulation wetting usually suffices. To clip, is to cut off all the straw-ends sticking out after plaiting, that come from where an old straw is plaited out and a new straw "set in." To mill the second time, is the same as at first, except that, as it is absolutely the same operation as ironing or pressing, where plait has been plaited with a twisted edge, the milling must only be up to this edge, not upon it, or the characteristic would be flattened out of all use and prettiness. To bunch, is to pass the plait from elbow to wrist, from elbow to wrist, over, like on a card; to cut it at ten links; and to tie it to keep so, for sale. To steam, is to put these completed links under the action of brimstone, to reduce their colour; and it is done by laying the straw-links at one end of a box, and a saucer-shaped piece of red hot iron at the other, upon which is dropped some lumps of sulphur that hiss up into a boil speedily. A lid, or cloth, is popped over the box the instant the brimstone has been dropped in, and it is allowed to remain closed for a full hour; the operation generally taking place in the garden or the yard, and at night, when it is too dark for nattier and more delicate labour.

As it is necessary now to put in a few notes about plaiting proper, it shall be said that men plait occasionally; women make a staple occupation of it; boys and girls, both, learn how to do it. The first lesson in plaiting is called (locally) "twittle twattle," being to plait loosely in three, and designed only to bring acquaintance with the mere handling of straws; the second lesson is "hen's



ladder," done with four straws, one of which is twisted round two; the third lesson is the perfect plaiting in seven, executed very slowly, of course, and so roughly that it is a long while before the plait is of any use. Plaiting schools were in existence before board schools drove them off the field. The fees for these were three halfpence and twopence a week; the object of them was that the little scholars should be kept at work by supervision, whereas at home they would have cheated their mothers (employed at domestic work) and have slipped away. A school would sometimes consist of sixty or seventy workers; and to make these work at their fastest, the mistress would set them to race or "strive." "Let's strive up Chalk-hill," she would cry; the top of Chalk-hill being attained by the first child who had finished a hundred "sets and runs;" a "set" being the working-in of seven new straws, a "run" the plaiting them as far as they will go. At the commencement of the "strive," each scholar had to nip off four straw-ends to mark where she began, or to "show fair;" and to beguile the time, each "set and run" was called a mile, with some woful danger successfully avoided as every mile was passed. To the winner (the first plaiter in) there was the imaginary gift of an imaginary horse and cart, in which she could be driven back the imaginary one hundred miles if she were graciously inclined; all plaiters who had passed the seventy miles had no dangers to fear for ever more; those too inert and slothful to have come up to this, were laggarads, to be eaten up by lions.

Over one and under two  
Pull it tight and that'll do,

was the ditty that gave further enlivenment to this imaginary journey, repeated ever and anon, as the fingers plied; and if everything had been of this pleasant sort, it would have been well. But the plaiting-mistress would impose upon a child the task of five "sets and runs," or ten, or fifteen, to be finished by a certain time; if the task were not finished, the child would get a "sting" from a "bat" (a sort of wooden battle-dore), or some strokes from a cane, or would be set up on a high stool to plait there, till the eyes grew dizzy, till the head swam, and there would be a sharp fall off; so it is good that plaiting schools are no more, and it would be good if every evil from plaiting would disappear as

thoroughly. This, though, cannot be. Coarse straws will always, more or less, take the skin off the plaiter's fingers as she plaits; dishonesty will always make necessary the "measuring-man," to pick out a "link" here and there at market-time, to measure it, and to burn it publicly in the market-place if it is deficient, hoist up on a high pole.

Perhaps, henceforth, if a plaiter should be met along the roads round about Hitchin, plaiting as she goes, with her plait-ends away from her (not to her, as might be supposed), a few of these facts may be thought of pleasantly.

#### REUNION.

WHERE shall we meet who parted long ago?  
The frosty stars were twinkling in the sky,  
The moorland lay before us white with snow,  
The north wind smote our faces rushing by.  
Where shall we meet? On such a moorland lone?  
In crowded city street, or country lane?  
On sandy beach-walk, while the sea makes moan?  
In quiet chamber? Shall we meet again  
On any spot of old familiar ground,  
Our childish haunts? or in a far-off land?  
Ah me! what if on earth no spot be found  
For longing eyes to meet, and clasping hand?  
What then?—If angry fate re-union bars,  
A better meeting waits beyond the stars.  
When shall we meet who parted in the night?  
At some calm dawning, or in noontide heat?  
To-day? to-morrow? or will years take flight  
Before our yearning hearts find welcome sweet?  
When shall we meet? While summer roses lie  
Beside our path, and rustle overhead?  
Or later, when a leaden winter sky  
Looks coldly on the empty garden-bed?  
While youthful faith and hopefulness are ours?  
Or only when our hair is growing gray?  
Ah me! we may have done with earthly hours  
Before it comes to us, that happy day!  
What then?—Let life's lone path be humbly trod,  
And where or when we meet, we leave to God.

#### OLD TOWNS BY THE SEA.

##### UNREFORMED ROMNEY.

It is pleasant driving along the sea-wall from Hythe to Romney. Dymchurch wall, as it is called, prevents the sea from changing its mind and reoccupying the eastern part of Romney-marsh, as it has already commenced to attack the west, and also provides an excellently flat road. Flatness, indeed, is the quality in which Romney-marsh particularly shines. It is as flat as a pancake, this vast reclaimed bay of the sea, well covered with grass, and inhabited by countless sheep. The only elevations above one dead level are the hillocks on which stand the old square-towered churches. The sheep are said to be of a particular breed, "capable of enduring greater privations from cold and stinted

food than other lowlanders." I should think this possible, for to my eye they appear exceedingly "wiry." Now wiriness may be an excellent quality in a horse, a dog, or a man, but in a sheep is perhaps hardly desirable. They look equal to any amount of wear and tear, these sheep of Romney-marsh, but whether they make good mutton I know not—for verily I have not eaten of them. When I was in Romney-marsh the natives fed me on ham and eggs and beef, as my aching jaws testify to this hour. I merely note this absence of mutton from the home of the sheep with melancholy accuracy—I am not irritated in the least—for it is the same everywhere. Everybody knows that if you want the Times early you must live at Eastbourne, and that if you want fish for breakfast you must stay in London. The soles of Rye, for instance, are famous for their quality, but not a fin of them can be bought in that town before the requirements of London are supplied. Only a few weeks ago I slept two nights hard by the "Sands o' Dee," then thick with salmon of superb firmness and quality; but there was no salmon for me till I sent for it to Chester. I have observed also that, in one of the best hotels at Birmingham, the cruet is all out of repair; and I have travelled through Cheshire without seeing a single cat. To return to "our muttons," I craved for a slice off one of those nibbling the short grass round Romney and Lydd. From the summit of Lydd church-tower I surveyed the vast expanse of grazing ground spread out before me like a map, and marked the thousands of white specks dotting the green pastures, and at that altitude—attained by a long agony of winding staircase, and much-worn steps—my mind, when I recovered breath enough to think, turned upon the juiciness of the marsh mutton. I resolved that, if permitted to escape alive from the horrors of that corkscrew torture, and to feel myself once more safe and sound on mother earth, I would take my revenge on that famous mutton. As certain people of the United States of America put it, I had "my mouth set" for the dish immortalised by Thackeray; but I might as well have "set" that useful organ for diamond-backed terrapin. There was no mutton to be had that day at Lydd. I do not know the why or the wherefore. Perhaps it was too hot, or the sheep had "struck;" but there was no mutton for the weary wayfarer. The

only alternative was beef, and this, with the recollection of the Hythe ox, was not encouraging; but it was beef or nothing, and a beefsteak I was compelled to take. Now I have, in the course of my uncomfortable life, eaten a great many tough things. Goat, I take it—if of venerable age, newly killed, and served in the Alps as a chamois stew—is not bad work for the teeth; bear steak also is calculated to wear out a fair set of molars in a short space of time; but, on mature consideration, I will back the beef of Romney-marsh for tenacity against any animal substance that I am acquainted with.

The view from Lydd church-tower, towards Dungeness, is a marvel of flatness and stoniness. Dungeness itself is not a bold foreland—an advanced guard of the white battaglia of Albion, like the North and South Forelands, and Beachy-head, flaunting its banner in the breeze, and daring the edacious waves to do their worst—but a long, narrow, sneaking agglomeration of stones, seeking strength from the sea, instead of haughtily defying it. Stretching out from the low line of shore, it shoots its venomous tongue far into the great bay between Dover and Fairlight, and, like a giant ant-eater, captures a host of victims. Perched on the extremity of this ill-looking promontory is a beacon to warn the mariner; but judging from the skeletons of sunken ships, which grin horribly from the sands around, the warning has oft come too late to avert disaster. Great gaunt ribs of wood and iron appeal for vengeance on the ugly shingle bank, the summit of which barely appears above the level of the sea. If it were not for these ghastly relics, which lend a dismal interest to the scene, Dungeness might be cited as the very embodiment of the unpicturesque. Compared with Beachy-head, it is as a battery "*à fleur d'eau*" to the lofty keep of a Norman castle, and in practical destructiveness vindicates this comparison. It is unpretending, insidious, and deadly, and is as dreary as it is maleficent. I do not think I should like to retire from active life, and become the custodian of Dungeness lighthouse. It is the dreariest place I ever saw—a fit abode for the giant Despair.

The fine sea air which pervades Romney-marsh has had a singularly conservative effect upon its institutions. The conservation and reclamation of land have been watched over by a corporate body acting

on the "Ordinances of Henry de Bathe, one of the judges itinerant of Henry the Third; the repairing of walls and drainage being vested in the lands of twenty-three adjoining manors, called the Lords of the Levels," and among the most interesting features of the marsh is the existence in its heart of the extraordinary unreformed corporation of New Romney, formerly on the banks of the eccentric river Rother. Previous to the Conquest, Old Romney was a seaport, but at that period had already been left inland by the silting up of the river's mouth, and is now reduced to a church embosomed in trees, and a few scattered houses. New Romney, its once vigorous successor, is now far from the sea, but was one of the original Cinque Ports, supplying its regular contingent to the king in time of war, and enjoying equal privileges and immunities with its brethren. Its prosperity came to an end with the great storm in the reign of Edward the First, during which the Rother abandoned its ancient bed, and found a new way into the sea at Rye harbour. For a long while the general courts of the Cinque Ports were held at New Romney, after their removal from ancient Shepway Cross, hard by Lympne. It is now a long rambling place, with a population a little over a thousand souls. Disfranchised under the Reform Bill, it escaped the operation of the Municipal Reform Acts, and preserves sundry fine old customs now threatened with abolition, thanks to Sir Charles Dilke and the Royal Commission now sitting to inquire into the condition of unreformed corporations.

In a previous paper of the present series, the descent of the Cinque Ports and their Lord Warden from the ancient corps of British marines, and their chief the Count of the Saxon Shore, has been adverted to. It is more than probable that under the Saxon kings, until the reign of Edward the Confessor, some relics of the ancient organisation existed; but we are quite certain that under the Plantagenet kings the Cinque Ports did good service against the Frenchmen, and in the "war of a hundred years" paid heavily in purse and in person for the privileges they enjoyed. When the royal navy, like the royal army, was "raised" for every occasion, the officer who ruled the Cinque Ports was a First Lord of the Admiralty plus Admiral of the Fleet and Suzerain of the Cinque Ports, within which his authority, exercised within the four corners of certain

charters, was supreme. Sir Robert de Shurland, Warden of the Cinque Ports under Edward Longshanks, was endowed with privileges of a peculiar kind touching flotsam and jetsam. This worthy knight lies buried in the church at Minster by Sheerness, where his monument may yet be seen. He is armed and cross-legged, and at the back of the tomb is seen the head of a horse, apparently swimming. Either as lord of the manor of Shurland or as Lord Warden, he obtained a grant of "wreck of the sea." This privilege enabled him to claim everything he could touch with the point of his lance, after riding into the sea at low water as far as possible. The appearance of the horse's head on the tomb gave rise to a curious local tradition, which will be familiar to readers of the admirable "Ingoldsby Legends." A priest in his neighbourhood having refused to bury a corpse without payment, Sir Robert, with a fine mediæval sense of humour, made a corpse of the priest, and then, feeling unsafe, retired to his stronghold of Eastchurch on the Isle of Sheppey, and remained there till the king passed the island, when he swam off and obtained his pardon, on condition of returning to land in the same way. "He accomplished this in safety, but being told by a witch that the horse which had that day saved his life would yet cause his death, he killed it at once to defeat the prophecy. Some time after, in walking on the beach, he kicked against what he took to be a stone, but it was the skull of his ill-requited steed; he had broken it by the blow, a piece of the bone pierced his foot, and he died, only living long enough to direct that his horse should share his monument."

The district ruled over by Sir Robert de Shurland was independent of all local jurisdiction—in fact a county palatine, extending from the red cliff at Seaford to Yarmouth on the Norfolk coast. To the Cinque Ports proper—Sandwich, Dover, Hythe, Romney, and Hastings—were added first Winchelsea and Rye, and then numerous "limbs," such as Seaford, Pevensey, and Faversham, Brightlingsea in Essex, and even places now remote from the sea, as Tenterden—preserved from oblivion by its proverbial steeple—Lydd, Sarre, and Fordwich. In the time of Henry the Builder, the ports had to provide seventy-two ships, each carrying twenty-one men and a boy, to serve the king at their own cost for fifteen days, and as long after as they might be wanted—if paid.

The relative importance of the towns in the year 1229, may be guessed from the rate at which their contingent was assessed. Dover and Hastings each supplied twenty-one ships; Winchelsea, ten; and Sandwich, Hythe, Romney, and Rye, five ships each. A certain livery or uniform was worn by those serving on the Cinque-Port fleet. It was ordained that "every person that goeth into the navy of the ports shall have a coat of white cotton, with a red cross and the arms of the ports underneath; that is to say, the half-lion and the half-ship." In return for this service, they received the privileges to which the "unreformed" still cling as closely as possible. They monopolised the trade with France, Spain, and Italy; they were entirely self-governed—the king's writ being only of force through the concurrence of the Lord Warden. The freemen were styled "barons," and traded toll-free in every corporation in the kingdom. Moreover they could, for offences, wherever committed, only be tried by their peers before the Lord Warden, or before the king in person. They were exempt from all military duties in the field, and could not be removed beyond their jurisdiction but for the assistance of each other. Their main court, called the court of "Brodhyl" or brotherhood, met twice a year; first at Shepway Cross, and then at Romney, as the central port. They also asserted a right to carry a canopy of cloth, or silk, on silver poles over the king and queen at coronations; and another privilege—sometimes resisted—to sit at the king's right hand at the coronation banquet. Their customs were peculiar. They drowned their thieves, or threw them over Shakespeare's-cliff; they pulled down the houses of a faithless mayor, and announced the election of a new one by the sound of the trumpet. Besides the great court of Shepway above mentioned, there was another court, of inferior authority, called the court of Guestling—where the members that were corporate, as guests invited, appeared and sat with those of the ports and ancient towns—which was held annually on the Tuesday following St. Margaret's-day, at New Romney. The number of persons to appear at these general courts or guestlings were—of every corporation of the ports and the two towns in the brotherhood, seven; viz., the head officer (whether mayor, bailiff, or deputy), three of the jurats or aldermen, and three com-

moners or freemen. But afterwards, by decree of each court, the number was reduced to five; viz., the mayor, two jurats, and two commoners. The Municipal Corporation Act made inroads in those corporations which still returned members to parliament, but the disfranchised remained unreformed. Among these is New Romney, which is still administered under an ancient statute, curiously perverted from its pristine significance. For a long time past the general body of inhabitants have been excluded from all share in the management of their local affairs. New Romney has, by degrees, simmered down into a quiet family party, the corporation having fallen, as such things have a tendency to do, into the hands of a clique, united by blood and friendship. By the charter granted by her Majesty Queen Elizabeth of glorious memory, it is enacted that the mayor of New Romney should be chosen annually from the number of jurats by the jurats and commonalty, express provision being made that the number of jurats, or aldermen, shall not at any time exceed twelve. Advantage was taken, long ago, of the number of representatives to the court of Guestling, to reduce the corporate body to seven, and subsequently to five. These might be quite enough to manage the affairs of a town or village like New Romney; but, fortunately or unfortunately, there is property to be administered, and the gradual reduction of the corporation induces the belief that the whole business has gradually been brought within a "ring." For many years the number of jurats sank to two, instead of twelve, as implied by the charter. These two jurats alternately served the office of mayor, and, together with that indispensable official, the town clerk, and three resident freemen, represented the entire corporation. It is not recorded how the jurats settled which should play clown, and which pantaloon, in the civic pantomime; but the fact remains that the rest of the inhabitants were reduced to the rank of outside spectators. When the trumpet sounded at midnight to announce the election of a new mayor, its voice spoke pertinently to only two pairs of ears. Clown and pantaloon played, in fact, at see-saw; the town clerk officiated as harlequin; and the three freemen, as attendant sprites. The pantomime is performed round a tomb in the church, the doors being locked; so that the



denizens of New Romney are not permitted even to witness the transformation-scene. All these proceedings would be funny enough, and especially delightful to admirers of the good old times, were it not for the property before mentioned. But it is at this point that the laugh does not "come in." Nearly six hundred acres of land are vested in the pantomime company "for the benefit of the parish and its inhabitants." The annual value of this property is variously assessed at from seven hundred to one thousand pounds—the latter amount having been tendered for it by one enterprising would-be-lessee. But this plan of openly letting their land has not found favour in the sight of the actors. They prefer letting the land among themselves—dividing it, in short, as clown and pantaloons divide the sausages, after greasing the floor in order to bring down the unhappy pork-butcher. These comedians know nothing of accounts. Out of the funds in their hands they pay sixty pounds a year for gas; twenty-five to the school; they pay out of the police-rate two town sergeants—there could not be a pantomime without a policeman—the mayor gets thirty pounds a year, and the chamberlain twenty. The balance is not accounted for.

The inhabitants of Romney have other grievances against their odd corporation. It is asserted that a certain "black book" exists, containing the old records of Romney, according to which dwellers in that town can demand their freedom, and the town lands should be let "by competition to the inhabitants for not less a period than seven years." But it is kept locked up, and access to it is denied by the authorities; and it is, moreover, urged that the facetious corporation now and then exercise judicial powers, by locking people up at night, and kicking them out in the morning, without going through the ceremony of bringing them before the pantomime mayor in custody of the comic policemen.

To the great relief of all those who believe in the efficacy of Royal Commissions, the whole of the affairs of Romney are now undergoing examination, together with those of other rotten corporations.

Not very long ago, other ancient and delightful customs prevailed in Romney-marsh. The ancient burghers of the Cinque Ports had never abrogated their privilege of trading with the Continent under certain immunities. It is true that successive kings

and their hungry ministers had imposed heavy duties on certain foreign articles—notably, brandy and Hollands, lace and tobacco; but Romney-marsh was far too remote from London to know much, or care anything, about these tyrannous enactments. News took a long time to arrive in the marsh, so long, that it was said the marshmen heard of the repeal of the corn laws and the battle of Waterloo at about the same time. The noble "Cinque-porter" went on his own way, and exercised his right of trading inland without tithe or toll. He imported "right Nantz" and aromatic Schiedam on a large scale. He smoked the best tobacco, and his wife wore Brussels laces and silks of price. To the hired myrmidons of a tyrannical government the gallant marshman appeared to be a smuggler; but that coarse definition of his calling was only employed by those who dwelt afar in darkness and ignorance. He was simply a good Conservative, a thoroughbred Tory of the grand old stock. His ancestors had brought the good red wine of Guienne to Rye and to Romney, to Hythe and Winchelsea, in the days when the Black Prince held his court at Bordeaux, and the best vineyards in France were appanages of the English crown. In the long war of a hundred years their towns had been pillaged and burnt, while they were afloat, fighting valiantly for the king. He ever held fast by the old order of things. When Dutch William came over in 1688, it took many years before the marshmen would acknowledge the change of government. One Godfrey Cross, an innkeeper of Lydd, came to a bad end through giving the information to De Tourville, which enabled him to win the battle off Beachy-head; and Sir John Fenwick was captured while in hiding at New Romney, under the name of Thomas Ward. For long after these events Romney-marsh remained faithful to the Stuarts, whose emissaries haunted it till Jacobitism died a natural death. As a proof of how far the marsh is still behind the age, may be cited the fact that one of its most advanced spirits, a leader of the malcontents, constantly alludes to the present as the "eighteenth" century. Even he—reformer as he is—is a hundred years in arrear of the ordinary world. What wonder, then, that the ordinary inhabitants retained to a late date the practice of trading freely, without reference to Customs regulations? Their firm faith on this subject was not altogether peculiar

to themselves—being shared by many men of wealth and substance in London and other cities. Take him altogether, Will Watch is one of the most puzzling entities the writer has encountered. His ghost appears in very various guise—sometimes attired as a seaman of the transpontine dramatic type; sometimes as a wild horseman, careering over the Weald at dead of night, with tubs slung in front and in rear of him; again as a blear-eyed troglodyte of clerical cut, in a dimly-lighted vault, piled high with bales and barrels; and anon as a City merchant, in sleek broadcloth and spotless linen, standing in court, declining, with an unctuous smile, the offer of the judge who has “exchequered” him for forty thousand pounds, to “give him time” to pay it in, and protesting that the house of W. Watch, Sons, and Co., “requires no credit.” Not long ago I made the acquaintance of a descendant, or rather connection, of the Watch family—in other words, the son-in-law of the most famous smuggler in Romney-marsh. He did not wear a tarpaulin, or a pea-jacket; he chewed not at all. His clothes were well cut, with a slight dash of horsiness, and his general style was that of a highly-successful gentleman farmer. He did not endeavour to sell me bandana handkerchiefs or bogus Havanas; far from it. He gave me food and sound claret thereto, and told me many a tough story of the old time, when absolute free trade reigned from Hythe to Hastings. The mere running of a cargo, in the teeth of revenue officers, was a small matter on the long, low shore around fatal Dungeness. It was when “the stuff” was landed that the difficulties of Watch and Co. began. A moonless night, a swift lugger, a favourable tide, and perfect knowledge of the coast settled the first part of the business; the difficult section of the journey was that from the coast-line into the heart of the Weald, whence Maidstone or London itself could easily be reached. At times the tubs were sunk in strings close in shore; at others it was thought well to get them ashore, and safely stored in one of the square-towered churches of the marsh. No clergyman of that charmed district was ever heard to complain of desecration, for two or three propitiatory tubs were always left behind. Times have been when service could not be performed on Sunday mornings, owing to the preoccupation of the sacred fane, but no marshman ever

sighed at the deprivation of religious solace. From the churches by the sea the tubs were whirled away, on the first dark night, across the dreary marsh and through the oaks of the Weald to Goudhurst, Hawkhurst, or Biddenden, where was good cover, and eke staunch associates to forward the “stuff.” Much of the good liquor imported in this pleasant, free-trading fashion was devoted to the fiery throats of the Sussex ironworkers. The last furnace for smelting iron with charcoal in that county, came to an end less from the badness of business than from the festive habits of the foundry men. Being well refreshed with Hollands, these gallant fellows neglected to “charge” the furnace properly. Being “mixed” both in mind and in liquor, they forgot the proper quantity of limestone. The flux did not separate, and remained a mass from which the iron could not be drawn off; the furnace was put out of blast, and has never been “blown in” since.

One more industry prospered of old in the marsh. Frenchmen—a term which then included all foreigners—were well-known to be bad and desperately wicked, deceitful too; oftentimes cheating good, hearty, bluff, honest Englishmen out of their proper measure of brandy, and also in the strength and quality thereof; wherefore it behoved the marshman to “get square” with those fraudulent foreigners. He was not unequal to the occasion, and, knowing the Frenchman’s love for English golden guineas, made a few for him of a particular alloy, not quite so valuable as standard gold, but quite good enough for Frenchmen and the like. These precious coins were stored up, and “rung in” upon occasion, one or two “duffers” to the five guineas, just enough to equalise the deal with the rascally foreigners—no more, not a jot, on the honour of Will Watch!

#### SNUFF-TAKING IN ENGLAND.

WHILE Englishmen took to tobacco-smoking with surprising alacrity, the most innocent of sensualities, as Southey calls it, crept into favour among them only by slow degrees. We cannot but wonder a little at this. Unless smoking was practised before the introduction of tobacco, they might have been expected to take more readily to the nasal use of the weed, since they were in the habit of indulging in

sternutatories, or sneezing-powders, of various kinds, to clear their brains, quicken their wits, and cheer their hearts. The trimly-dressed lord, who pestered Hotspur, carried

A pouncet-box, which, ever and anon,  
He gave his nose, and took't away again;  
Who, therefore angry, when it next came there,  
Took it in snuff.

To take a thing in snuff was to take it offensively, and express contempt of the offender by drawing up the nostrils, or "making noses" at him; much as Sir Joshua did when coxcombical critics irritated him by talking of "their Raphaels, Correggios, and stuff." In a song in praise of the most sovereign and gracious weed that ever the earth tendered to the use of man—a song sung in strange defiance of royal prejudice, before King James the First, at Oxford—tobacco is described as a whiffler that cries "Huff snuff" with fury; and tobacco-powder, in all probability, owes its name to the users of it drawing up their nostrils, after the manner of an angry man taking an unwelcome remark in snuff.

Lassels, who visited Italy in the middle of the seventeenth century, tells us that the town of Poggi Bonzi was famous for its perfumed tobacco in powder; "which the Italians and Spaniards take far more frequently than us, as needing neither candle nor tinder-box to light withal, nor using any other pipes than their own noses." Lillie, the Strand tobacconist, immortalised by his connection with the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, asserts that snuff-taking was very little known in England until the beginning of the last century, "being chiefly a luxurious habit among foreigners residing here, and a few of the English gentry who had travelled abroad." They made their snuff as they wanted it, by rubbing a roll of tobacco across a grater inside the snuff-box; and then, by pressing a spring, forced a small quantity of the dust through a tube upon the back of the hand, to be snuffed up the nostrils for the sake of producing a sneeze, which was no part of the snuff-taker's design in the time of Queen Anne. Long before that time snuff was popular in Scotland and Ireland. In 1643 the compurgators of Dunfermline—functionaries appointed to look after the morals of their fellow-townsmen, and see that they observed the Sabbath duly—ordered Andrew Thomson, bellman, to take notice of those who, in time of preaching and other times of God's

service, took their sneezing tobacco in the more remote parts of the communion aisle, where they thought they could not be seen. Again, in 1648, it was considered necessary that public admonishing should be given from the pulpit itself to those who took "sneezing" in the kirk in times of preaching and praying. As to Ireland, we have Howel's testimony. Sending, in 1646, some tobacco to a friend, he assures him it was gathered near the King of Spain's gold mines of Potosi; and then, after sounding the praises of the herb generally, goes on, "The Spaniards and Irish take it most in powder or smutchin, and it mightily refreshes the brain; and I believe there is as much taken this way in Ireland as there is in pipes in England. One shall commonly see the serving-maid upon the washing-block and the swain upon the plough-share, when they are tired with labour, take out their boxes of smutchin, and draw it into their nostrils with a quill; and it will beget new spirits in them, and fresh vigour to fall to their work again." A hundred and fifty years later, John Wesley warned a preacher, bound for the Green Isle, against using snuff unless by order of a physician, declaring that no people were in such blind bondage to the silly, nasty, dirty custom as were the Irish; and that to that bondage, their love of drinking liquid fire, and their liking for living in smoky cabins, they were indebted for the blindness so common among them. So far did Pat carry his love of smutchin, that it was his custom, when a wake was on, to put a plate full of snuff upon the dead man or woman's stomach, from which each guest was expected to take a pinch, upon being introduced to the corpse.

Snuff-taking, however, was in vogue in England at a much earlier date than Lillie would have us believe. The author of *A Natural History of Coffee, Thee, Chocolate, and Tobacco*, writing in 1682, remarks that Irishmen powdered their tobacco to snuff it up their nostrils, as some Englishmen did; and Oldham complains of a sycophant:

There's naught so mean can 'scape the flattering sot,  
Not his lord's snuff-box, nor his powder-pot.

Mistress Behn jeers the fops of her loose-living day, for taking snuff out of mere idleness. Butler sneers at the high-shoe lords of Cromwell's making—who held smoking to be an ungodly custom—for tickling their noses with ill-smelling snuff;



and another Royalist says the sight of a shoe-rose of blue riband, or king's colour, provoked Puritans to put pepper up their noses. Richard Braithwaite dedicated *The Smoking Age*, published in 1617, to those three renowned and "unparalleled" heroes, Captain Whiff, Captain Pipe, and Captain Snuff. Half-a-dozen years earlier, a devotee of the weed, defending its use upon economical grounds, writes:

Much victual serves for gluttony, to fatten men like swine;  
But he's a frugal man, indeed, that on a leaf can dine,  
And needs no napkin for his hands, his fingers' ends to wipe,  
But keeps his kitchen in his box, and roastmeat in a pipe.  
This is the way to help dear years, a meal a day's enough,  
Take out tobacco for the rest, by pipe, or else by snuff.

And we have Decker's word for it that snuff was no stranger to the noses of the subjects of Queen Bess, for he tells us: "Before the meat comes smoking on the board, our gallant must draw out his tobacco-box, the ladle for the cold snuff into the nostrils, the tongs and priming-iron; all which artillery may be of gold or silver, if he can reach the price of it; it would be a reasonable, useful pawn at all times."

A rhyming snuff-hater attributes the introduction of snuff into society to the discovery, by over-fond lovers of "the sanguine juice," that sneezing counteracted the effects of drinking:

Wine ruled the soul; snuff conquered wine;  
Each sot had then his box to purge his brain,  
And drank to sneeze, and sneezed to drink again.

We may much more safely lay the spread of snuff-taking among Englishmen to the advent of the plague. They had so much faith in the power of tobacco to ward off contagion, that the appearance of the pest drove those to snuff who never snuffed before, and gave good excuse to those who already snuffed to snuff the more. The coming of a more welcome immigrant, the hero of the glorious Revolution, tended to establish snuff-taking firmly in fashionable favour. The beaux of the period carried snuff in the hollow, perforated heads of their walking-canes; and when they hedged in the actors on the stage, instead of lighting up their pipes between the acts, as their Elizabethan prototypes used to do, they amused the audience on the other side of the foot-

lights by displaying "their soft graces, their snuff-boxes, awkward bows, and ugly faces;" and amused themselves by dilating upon the merits, not of the play, but of the modish sand with which they fed their nostrils from a spoon. One of Southerne's fops, entreating another to pass his opinion upon his powder, is taken aback by the oracle's pronouncing it to be Havannah indeed, but washed, and made of the leaves of the tobacco; and exclaims, "Why, what the devil's yours?" "Mine, sir," replies the connoisseur, "mine, sir, is right palillio, made of the fibres—the spirituous part of the plant. There's not a pinch of it, out of my box, in England. 'Twas made, I assure you, to the palate of his most Catholic majesty, and sent over by a great don of Spain that is in his prince's particular favour." If Mr. Fairholt did not assure us that palillio was a Portuguese snuff, properly called pulvilio, we should have supposed Friendall's boasted powder to have been rancia, remarkable for its fineness, strength, pungency, and velvety softness, since it was always put up in canisters sealed with the King of Spain's arms, and rarely found its way into the market, being reserved for presentation to ambassadors and ministers—whence it was known as cabinet snuff. According to Lillie, it was difficult to get any really high-class snuff in England. Pure Brazilian, known by its greenish-yellow hue, and a peculiar fragrant imparted to it by its being packed in bottles that had contained angel-water, could only be obtained from Brazil by stratagem, its exportation being forbidden on pain of death. But small quantities were carried on board ships in Brazilian ports by monks visiting them, on pretence of receiving the confessions of the sailors. Most of the snuff sold here was Havannah snuff, imported by the South Sea Company, and manipulated in various ways, to suit the different fancies of snuff-takers.

Never was there such a taking of snuff as when, in 1702, Rooke cleared Port St. Mary and the galleons in Vigo Bay of half-a-ton weight in bags, bales, and buffalo-hides, and some thousands of barrels besides. Upon the fleet disgorging its spoils at Plymouth, Portsmouth, and Chatham, waggon-loads of snuff were sold at the rate of threepence and fourpence a pound. Small folk, hitherto content to leave snuff to their betters, could not withstand the temptation of becoming acquainted with a new pleasure. Once the



taste was acquired, the luxury became a necessity, and a demand was created for cheap snuff. This the tobacconists were not slow in meeting. They pressed into the service every vegetable substance, that could be used to adulterate the genuine article. They concocted vile mixtures of tobacco-dust, safin, yellow sand, brick-dust, and rotten wood, or powder of post, which, mingled with the sweepings of workshops and warehouses, were ground up in a horse-mill. The valuable composition was then washed, coloured with red ochre and amber, mixed with molasses and water, and pressed into jars, barrels, and canisters, that it might be turned out again in lumps, like genuine Spanish snuff. Nowadays this sort of stuff is officially known as offal snuff, and, when analysed, is found to contain oxide of iron, aluminum, glass, coal, pinewood, fustic, straw, and sand—ingredients calculated to carry much comfort and refreshment to the nasal organ!

The fact that his precious powder was no longer caviare to the multitude did not put the bean out of conceit with it. He still remained a creature compounded of a few affected airs, a periwig, a coat laden with powder, and a snuff-besmeared face; whose chief pleasure in life lay in chatting in a side box, preliminary to whipping behind the scenes to talk and take snuff with the actresses; and a fop of the first quality was still recognised as such by his ribanded sword, feathered hat, his invisible-jointed Paris box, and his affected judgment in Havannah snuff. One of Cibber's dames laments that her pet monkey cannot talk and take snuff, the only accomplishments he wanted to make him more dangerous among ladies than any fop in the country, when every possessor of a long wig and a snuffbox held himself justified in pretending to a heiress of a thousand a year. In justice to the beaux, it must be conceded that, as regards snuffing, they lacked neither the companionship nor countenance of grave men. The doctors, always ready to ascribe all the ills to which flesh is heir to the ruling fashions of the day, stigmatised snuff-taking as the cause of cancer in the nose, apoplexy, and other

dire convulsive ills,  
That thin the town and swell the weekly bills;

but, as inconsistent as the French court physician, who refreshed himself with pinch after pinch while inveighing against the silly creatures who snuffed destruction

up their greedy noses, the doctors defied their own auguries and plied the box constantly. Swift and Pope, Addison and Steele, derided the butterflies of fashion for falling back upon their boxes when their tongues failed them, but nevertheless followed their example. Lawyers took a pinch from a client's box before they took their fee, and if on 'Change a would-be speculator inquired the price of stocks, "before their lips they opened first the box," believing "that every pinch of snuff they took helped trade in some degree." To refuse to give a pinch and take a pinch was an unpardonable breach of good manners, so gentlemen, having no liking for snuff, carried a box that they might proffer a pinch for politeness; just as Daniel Dancer, the Pinner miser, carried one for profit. This ingenious economist levied contributions on every snuffbox opportunity opened to his fingers, the pinches extracted being carefully deposited in his own box. When that was full, its contents were bartered for a candle, which he contrived should last him until he was able to repeat the transaction, which usually came about in a month's time.

Fashion, so rarely in one mood six months together, untired by a century's constancy to snuff, remained true to it through the Georgian era. Boswell, turning poet in its favour, asked,

Who takes—who takes it not? where'er I range  
I smell thy sweets from Pall Mall to the 'Change.

The best of biographers inhaled its sweets often enough in taking his walks along Fleet-street with the great Doctor, for Johnson's craving that way was almost as insatiable as that of Bencher Coventry, who took his powder by palmfuls, diving for it under the flaps of his capacious waistcoat, till clouds of snuff broke from each majestic nostril and darkened the air. Such an exhibition would have been outrageous in the eyes of the men of taste, for whom veritable Strasbourg had no charms unless it came out of a Paris paper-box, and would have disgusted the pretty fellows who made a pinch the excuse for taking a glance at the reflection of their dear faces in the lids of their boxes of highly-polished metal. Indeed, had the Johnsonian method prevailed, there would have been an end of snuffboxes. As things were, they taxed alike the ingenuity of the manufacturer, the taste of the artist, and the purse of the snuff-taker, while they excited the am-

bition of the collector. Edward Wortley Montague claimed the ownership of more snuffboxes than would have sufficed a hundred-nosed Chinese idol. Brummell and his fat friend—at whose coronation snuffboxes were given away to the tune of eight thousand pounds—prided themselves as much upon their collection of boxes as upon being unequalled in the art of opening one without using the right hand; and my Lord Petersham, who mixed his own snuff from a stock worth three thousand pounds, was supposed to use a different snuffbox every day in the year.

The ladies had no little to do with snuff holding its own so long. How soon English women began to follow the example of Catherine de Medicis we cannot tell. The dames of the Commonwealth have been set down as bigots of the box by reason of an impudent party-writer averring:

She that with pure tobacco will not prime  
Her nose, can be no lady of the time.

But this amounts to nothing, even if the worthlessness of the witness did not render his testimony utterly valueless. The meaning of the couplet has been misapprehended. The old way of "drinking tobacco" was to draw the smoke into the mouth and expel it through the nostrils, a young fellow who failed to "put it through his nose" being described as a milksop, incapable of taking his tobacco as a gentleman should; and the libeller in question proceeds to declare no woman could claim to be considered a lady on the strength of being able to drink and whiff unless she was ready to swear oaths by the score; plainly showing he intended to charge the fair Roundheads with smoking, not snuffing, and there is no gainsaying that some of the sex were in the habit of indulging in a pipe of excellent vapour. It is not until we come to the reign of Queen Anne, that we find positive proof of masculine noses no longer enjoying a monopoly of the piquant powder. The feminine admirers of Sacheverell contended as ardently for a pinch of his "orangery," as second-hand beaux had once struggled to dip their fingers in Dryden's box, and carried their idol's portrait in the lids of their boxes. A lady, writing in 1712, describes herself as an insignificant creature, who dressed not, took no snuff, and did no fashionable things. Lady Betty Modish, who would accept no gift from her lover save a snuffbox, asserts, "sincerity in love is as much out of fashion as sweet snuff,

nobody takes it now;" which may account for the feminine dissatisfaction expressed in the lines:

From agate box, the newest mode,  
Her snuff Miss Bid takes in a shell,  
A thousand times to me she's vowed,  
'Tis faint, 'tis languid, has no smell.

Steele inveighed loudly against the impertinent custom fine women had fallen into; which, whether performed coquettishly, or with a sedate, masculine air, was in his eyes equally disagreeable. He describes Mrs. Saunter taking snuff as often as salt with her meals, with such wonderful negligence, that an upper lip covered with snuff and sauce was presented to all who had the honour of dining with her; while her pretty niece made up for not offending the eye to the same degree by startling the ear with a nauseous rattle, as she stopped her nostrils with her fingers. He could bear with beauties who manipulated the snuffbox for the sake of displaying a pretty hand; but thought Flavilla went a little too far in pulling out her box in the middle of the sermon, and offering it to the men and women sitting near her; as well as inviting the churchwarden to take a pinch as she dropped her contribution into the plate. Sir Richard declares—how truthfully, who shall say?—that a learned lady of his acquaintance, whom he had vainly tried to talk out of the evil habit, happened one day to have a pretty fellow hidden in her closet when some company called. She made an excuse to go to the closet for something they were talking about; her eager gallant snatched a kiss, but, being unused to snuff, some grains from her upper lip set him sneezing, much to the astonishment of the visitors, who thereby learned that profound reading, and very much intelligence, could not fill up her vacant hours so much but she was obliged to descend to less intellectual entertainment.

Of course the sex treated such lecturings with contempt. Neither wise words nor witty words ever yet availed against fashion. Fine ladies still continued to kill time by the aid of snuff—still held it to be a sovereign remedy for fashionable feminine ailments:

One pinch of snuff relieved the vapoured head,  
Removed the spleen, removed the qualmish fit,  
And gave a brisker tone to female wit.

Forty years after Steele had preached without converting, the Connoisseur complained that women, who should cultivate cleanliness, persisted in industriously be-

daubing themselves with snuff; and warned them that it was an implacable enemy to the complexion, besides bloating the nose, embrowning the fingers, and making lovers chary of tasting the honey of their lips. Maids followed the example of their mistresses; nay, more:

But ask a wench how oysters sell? if nice  
She begs a pinch before she sets a price.

The gentlemen, however, as a rule, aided and abetted the ladies in giving a tawny shade to their lips. Garrick presented his wife with a gold snuffbox. The dainty little trinket was to be seen not many years back in the shop-window of a London pawnbroker, side by side with a diamond ring, "once the property of Mrs. Nisbett." When Mrs. Sterne was about to join her husband in Paris, in 1762, he wrote, "You will find good tea upon the road from York to Dover; only bring a little to carry you from Calais to Paris. Give the custom-house officer what I told you. At Calais give more, if you have much Scotch snuff; but, as tobacco is good here, you had best bring a Scotch mull, and make it yourself; that is, order your valet to manufacture it, 'twill keep him out of mischief;" and, in a second letter, he adds, "You must be cautious about Scotch snuff; take half a pound in your pocket, and make Lyd do the same." Charles Lamb did not object to his sister favouring the mode; perhaps, like Dr. Dunlop, he thought it decent to see an old maid taking snuff; and she was not ashamed to picture herself and her brother writing the *Tales from Shakespeare* at one table. "Like a literary Darby and Joan; I taking snuff, and he groaning all the while, and saying he can make nothing of it, till he has finished, when he finds he has made something of it." Mary Lamb, like Mrs. Sterne, had, doubtless, to content herself with Scotch snuff. She could not pretend to the dowager's delight, macauba; still less to the delicious compound of rappee and bitter almonds, scented with ambergris and attar, called Violet Strasbourg, which Queen Charlotte adulterated with green tea ere she snuffed it up her royal nose. So lately as 1829 snuff was something which "almost every well-bred man presents to every woman;" but its career, at least in the world of fashion, was nearly run, and came to a sudden end with the death of the last of the Georges. It is to be hoped the fair ones will never take snuff into favour again, although

they may take up with worse things; for if ladies of the present day turn up their noses at the nasty ways of their great-grandmothers, the latter might, if they had the chance, assert that it was better to wake the sleeping mind with a pinch of pure Brazilian, than to stupefy the senses with opium, morphia, and hydrate of chloral.

## PHEBE: GIRL AND WIFE.

BY PERCY FITZGERALD,

AUTHOR OF "NEVER FORGOTTEN," "THE SECOND MRS. TILLOTSON," &c. &c.

### CHAPTER LXIII. CONTEST.

FROM which glance at Phoebe's sad little household we now turn our eyes away again to that of the Pringles.

It was a delightful moment when that eminent visitor, Mr. Pratt-Hawkins, made his appearance one evening, having, as he explained, been just able to get away from the duchess's, "where they had Moulsey, Wrigley, and the Sarks;" all the personages thus alluded to usually enjoying their fuller style and title—as Lord Moulsey, Lord Wrigley, and the Earl and Countess of Sark. However, it was not meant disrespectfully on the part of our friend, but merely to show that he was on the most intimate terms with those noble people. The pleasure of his company was in the nature of a surprise; and it was curious that he had not thought of coming until he had written to, and received an answer from, his friend Lord Garterley, in which he had been made certain that there were some distinguished guests either arriving or to be expected. With him came the Shortlands, whom he met in the train, and with whom he made his triumphal entry. Indeed, it was Pratt-Hawkins's theory, when he came to stay with persons of this doubtful class, who, as it were, kept hotels for the entertainment of the genteel, that he did not live with the landlord but with the guests; and in this way he was not contaminated. He found, however, that the Pringles were greatly improved—they had acquired more "certainty of manners," though there was some trace of care on Mrs. Pringle's brow; and Sam, with all his pseudo bonhomie, had grown very rough and bitter. They had already begun to be sadly in need of money, in fact. The estate had not turned out nearly so profitable as they had believed; the amount of ready money left by old Joliffe was not so abundant;

and they were being pressed by the tradesmen. Then there was the great business of finding the dowry for the young lord and the "pony" who had been selected for him. Old Sam, from his previous training as a land agent, had learned a good deal about money matters; and now that he had come to regulate his own affairs, was proceeding to screw as much as possible out of those that were dependent upon him—the tenants on his estate. Already the "genial" Sam, as some of his lady friends conceived him to be, was known as a grasping, oppressive landlord.

In these duties he had the assistance of Adelaide, whom he delighted to call his "little secretary," and who had to repair to his study every day, for the purpose of assisting and putting his papers in order. Indeed, all the Joliffe papers were in a sad state of confusion; and "one of these days," which seems about as indefinite a period as "the Sunday in the middle of next week," or the Greek Calends, it was resolved that there should be a regular "overhauling," as it were, of those dusty accumulations.

"My heart is broke with these things," old Sam would say; "only for you, my dear, I'd be at my wits' end. You are an invaluable secretary." And in his coarse way, Sam, when allusion was made to this curious sort of assistance, would wink knowingly, and say:

"Perhaps she is qualifying for the place. And why not, sir. She will suit it admirably. Where could a more charming Mrs. P. number two be looked for?" When the listeners seemed, as they often did, taken aback at these coarse jests, Sam would laugh loudly, and protest, "it was only his fun," and that "he'd joke if he was given over by the doctors."

"Oh Mr. Pringle, at such a serious time, how can you?"

"Serious! Not at all. I'll never be so near recovery as when those gentry give me over."

But he was now engaged on what he considered most important business—"a revision of my rental," and was hunting up all his leases, &c. There were two radical farmers whom he had canvassed, and who had shown a most insolent spirit of independence, as it appeared to Sam. These he had determined, in his own phrase, "to mark" and "root out" of his estate. Their names were Packer and Butt; and no names were so often heard at breakfast

time, and dinner, at Joliffe's Court, the proprietor being never weary of announcing all that he intended doing in reference to Packer and Butt.

Unfortunately for his plans, when he came to consult the leases, papers, &c., connected with their holdings, he could not find them. They would appear to be lost in the confused mass of papers belonging to the Joliffe's Court estate. On this, Sam's faithful secretary came to his aid, and Miss Lacroix, bidding him tranquilise himself, with a smile declared that she would make a thorough search for the papers. And thus, for days, she had devoted herself to this task, exploring all the dusty tin cases, and turning over all the yellow and greasy bundles which had been lying undisturbed there for years.

What, again, it might be asked, was the motive at work in this young lady's mind? She seemed to be of too independent a character to be "currying favour" with "old Sam." Was it gratitude to the family who had been so kind to her? Or was it connected with a little conversation she had with Mr. Brookfield?

She always seemed anxious, as it were, to justify herself to him.

"I am sure," she said, "you are thinking it curious that I should devote myself in this fashion; but I have a reason."

"I am sure you have," he said, sarcastically. "Mr. Pringle takes care to let us know it. Why should you not make yourself acquainted with that which, so he informs us, you are hereafter to administer?"

She coloured.

"I thought that you would know more of the world than to accept his comic speeches for gospel. But I have long ago seen that you have the most contemptible opinion of me. You are inclined to set everything I do down to the meanest motives. In this instance there might be reasons. We, who have but little—the paupers of the world—cannot afford to be so noble and disinterested as others. Perhaps, too, I may have the power of keeping him in some restraint. Don't judge me so harshly always. I wish you would not."

"Why?" he asked, with some curiosity. "You have paid me that compliment on one or two occasions before now—of wishing to have my good opinion. Now might I ask you the reason?"

"You would have a poor opinion of me



were I to tell you. If you would only say what you think I ought to do; but it is very hard for me to know——"

He smiled.

"Well, such anxiety to please," he said, "would disarm anyone. What the worth of my good opinion could be to you is a mystery. But, possibly, I may be doing you injustice. Rightly or wrongly, I have taken it into my head that you are the only impediment that exists to making this a happy household. Show me that you are ready to do what is in your power—to do what is honourable——"

"There again," she said, "you are unjust to me. I assure you solemnly I have no concern in this alienation. As you can see yourself, the family is not anxious to have this daughter here; the husband also——"

"Ah, there!" said Mr. Brookfield, "now we approach the point of the whole. It appears to me that indirectly you encourage him in that."

"But why are you so concerned for her?" said she, looking at him with a keen gaze. "I might as fairly ask you this question. What is the secret of this wonderful interest about a person that you have seen only on a few occasions? I might as fairly put that question to you. But it would be too inquisitive on my part."

Slightly embarrassed, he answered:

"Pity. She is so helpless and so unfortunate."

"And have you no pity for others, who may not have been cast in the same dainty, piquant, china-figure mould? I have not those infinite pretty graces; but still I am entitled to fair consideration. If you knew what I have suffered, you would be more indulgent."

"You mean from your old school-fellow and friend?"

"At school I was a poor, helpless dependent. I was in the power of the two task-mistresses of the place, who knew that I was their slave, because there was no place on the earth where I could turn to. There was no house or home open to me. I was like one of those coolies that are brought over on a pretence of being free, but are the slaves of their employers by ingenious contrivances of the law of freemen. They knew this, and turned me into their drudge, their Smike; and by-and-by I was to be one of their 'lady teachers'; and then I should have been their property altogether."

He looked incredulous.

"Poor Misses Cooke," he said; "what a terrible sketch you give of them! They are certainly not known to be such ogres among their fashionable connections."

"There, again, you mistrust my account. Well, I wished to be released. By some strange good fortune I met a person that liked me, or thought he liked me."

"And you?"

"Whether I liked or thought that I liked him, does not matter now. At all events there was release, freedom from the hateful tyranny. The delight, the happiness at my approaching freedom was inconceivable. The sun began to shine for me once more; hope to spring up. Unfortunately I confided in what is called a friend."

"You mean in her—Phœbe?"

"Yes," she said, scornfully. "You like to repeat that name. I confided in her, and you know the rest. She offered to help me to speak with him; for he was a poor, uncertain creature, contemptible in every way. Through some presentiment I declined; when, unknown to me, and through a vile spirit of vanity or coquettishness, she interfered between me and him; and in a secret, cruel fashion, succeeded in winning over to herself the person that was to have rescued me. Think of one so young and so crafty. My friend, too—my bosom friend, as it is called. I could never forgive it."

He remained silent for a moment.

"After all, you could be mistaken; one so young might be thoughtless—or foolish."

"You are ready to find excuses for her," she said, impatiently. "I only tell you what occurred."

"And this admirer is now her husband? But that only makes your course more distinct. You are under the same roof with him. She is not."

"That is not my fault. Still, I have confidence in you, though you are her friend and not mine. Mind, all I have told you is a secret. You shall say what I am to do. Shall I go to the heads of the house, and tell them that they ought to bring home their daughter? It will fail, I know, and it will be my own destruction as well; for, as I said before, it will be my own ejectment. I shall do this to please you; yet by this very act I shall deprive myself of the pleasure of ever seeing or meeting you again. It is you, you see, who will turn me out on the world."

After a pause, he said:

"Perhaps I am a little unreasonable."

Well, you will promise me this; to do what you can, sincerely, and in all honour—let events take their course, and, at least, not oppose? If you promise that much—well, as to that good opinion you are so anxious for—well, we shall see.”

“I am to be on probation; my lord and master graciously allows it. I accept and promise cheerfully. There, you shall see from this hour how good I shall be.”

As she walked away he looked after her and said, half aloud:

“Strange being! Still, I do not know whether I ought to trust her.”

She went her way with a sort of elation.

“It is a sacrifice. But still I would do more to gain him. He shall love me yet, and before her. Oh,” she thought, “were he but to yield! Were I to conquer his proud nature! Then it might be we two against the world. But it is too much to contend against. Nothing will get over his secret distrust of me! What infatuation makes him form that idea of her sweet and pastoral innocence? He little dreams of the treachery that is within her young soul.”

These thoughts passed through her mind as she took her way from the house, much softened, and in a very sad and pensive tone of mind. She had gained some way, and this feeling always gives comfort. She was in no mood for Sam and his duties; and she did feel a certain shame as she thought of the remarks that must be made on her obsequiousness. “But what am I to do?” she said. “Only let me get something to depend on, something that will save me from being at the mercy of events, and then we shall see. It is easy enough to be independent when one has resources.”

The party at lunch this day was a large one. Bishop Drinkwater had returned after a short absence, and had announced that he would comply with the request of the incumbent, and preach a sermon on the following Sunday. There was a loud clatter of voices, in the midst of which old Sam entered in a very ill humour.

“Here’s pretty work,” he said, “a fellow starting up to oppose me. That Allen, the chap that was here so long with the last man. Did you ever hear of such impertinence? But there’s somebody behind him, I know.”

Mrs. Pringle looked helplessly from one face to the other. They were certainly most unfortunate, for people of their wealth, to be worried in this way.

“What is this Allen?” said the bishop; “one of these democrats or communists?”

“Oh I don’t know,” said Sam, impatiently; “belongs to the mob—the ‘Canal,’ as the French say.”

“It’s all one,” said Bishop Drinkwater; “you must oppose a firm front to him. I fear you are hardly the candidate to defeat him.”

“What d’ye mean by that?” said Sam, angrily.

“It should have been one of our solid university men,” said the bishop, not in the least conscious that he was depreciating his host, or, perhaps, scarcely caring whether he was or not. “Oh, it was a great mistake, a great mistake.”

“As great a one as making you a bishop,” growled Sam in a low voice to his neighbours, and then went on to dwell on the cost a contest would entail on him. In short, he was worried to death among them all.

The news was quite true. The election was only about a fortnight off; but the new candidate was formidable enough. He had a sort of ready eloquence, and harangued meetings at the very gate of Joliffe Court, holding up Sam as an oppressor and a griping landlord. Sam was, indeed, not popular, and was a most unlikely person to win the suffrages of the electors. But what was most damaging was the fact of this person declaiming on his own wrongs, and denouncing the Pringle family as usurpers.

Mr. Brookfield had happened to be passing by the common one afternoon, when he was attracted by one of these meetings, and drew near. The rustics were listening attentively to a tall, excited man, who spoke with animation and purpose on this very theme, though there was a sort of wildness in the strain.

“These people are the intruders. I believe there has been foul play of some kind. The place is ours—mine—by right. You know me, all of you; you have seen me here for years back. You know how the good old man—now in his grave—felt towards me and mine. How he would have given me all he had, and, I believe firmly, did give me all he had, only a few hours before he died. He told me himself that everything was to come to me; and so he did, and so he would, but for the foul play there has been at work. He was signing papers all that day—he was a secret man. Who knows what these people may have found, or may have done

with what they found? But never mind. It will be brought to light yet!"

Mr. Brookfield listened with much interest.

"How curious," he was saying to himself, "that those who are disappointed so invariably impute malice or fraud to the person that disappoints them. How poor old Sam would laugh to hear himself thus portrayed as a villain!"

#### CHAPTER LXIV. MR. PRINGLE RETURNS HOME.

"WELL! what's that, Batts?" Sam Pringle said, impatiently, as that menial brought in one of the coffee-coloured envelopes which are to be inseparably connected with tidings of good and evil; "more nuisance, I suppose?"

"For Mr. Francis, sir."

Sam opened it without scruple; read it with a "pish" of disgust.

"Why can't people write these things. Here, take it to him."

"Nothing unpleasant, I hope?" said Pratt-Hawkins.

"His wife's ill, and of course wants him at her side."

"Mr. Pringle's not in his room," said Mr. Batts.

"Then he's out in the grounds. Let him be looked for."

"Oh," said the bishop, "why, let me see. Didn't I meet him as I was taking my ride to the church? Yes; of course. And then, at the church, I found that—er—" and he made a disagreeable gulp—"that lady that's staying with you."

"Miss Lacroix?"

"Yes, precisely."

There was a silence.

"If you will give me the message," said Mr. Brookfield, "I will take it at once to him, and hurry him home. It is absolutely necessary it should not be neglected for an instant."

He rose, took the paper, and hurried off.

A mile or two from the house, in one of the bypaths which led across the fields from the church, he espied two figures in earnest conversation, that of Mr. Pringle and Miss Lacroix.

He hurried up at once, and put the paper into his hand.

"Explain to him," said she to Mr. Pringle, in great agitation, "that you followed me—that I did not wish it—that I bade you return."

"There will be no time for these interesting explanations," said Mr. Brookfield, coldly; "neither have I any desire to hear

them. You had better not lose an instant," he added, turning to Mr. Pringle. "The carriage is following, and the train leaves in half an hour."

"You do not believe me, then?" she said.

As he did not answer, a malicious glance shot from her eye.

"Pray do as Mr. Brookfield directs. In your absence he is guardian and protector."

Mr. Pringle darted a look at his companion. For the first time a feeling of doubt and suspicion came into his mind. Curiously connected with it was the disagreeable recollection of Tom Dawson, from whom he had endured so much that was odious and galling, and whose place, it occurred to him, this gentleman seemed to take. He turned sharply on him:

"You are very disinterested in this matter. Pray might I ask why are you so anxious about my household?"

"Don't lose any time; we'll talk of that when you return," said Mr. Brookfield.

"See, here is the carriage! Now, get in!"

"Get in?" repeated the other, in fresh vexation. "Do you take to ordering me?"

But the carriage came up, and the party got in and drove back to Joliffe's Court, before taking on Mr. Pringle to the railway.

As Miss Lacroix got out, Mr. Brookfield said to her, with genuine contempt:

"I am ashamed of myself for having been taken in for a moment."

She answered the contempt of his look rather than of his words.

"It is to be war, then? The war I carry on is always in the enemy's country."

"Come," said old Sam, suddenly—

"Come, honeybird and secretary-general, what are you at there? Quarrelling? Just let me know, if he worries you. You will come and help me, to-day, won't you?"

Miss Lacroix swept by her enemy triumphantly, and went to the study as she had been invited. She threw herself, heart and soul, into the business, and very soon the mass of confusion had begun to take shape under her orderly arrangement.

As Mr. Pringle, later in the day, was hurrying away, he suddenly turned aside from the hall and looked in at the study, the library, and all those various rooms where the company used to resort at idle times, but without finding what he sought.

"Where is Miss Lacroix?" he called to the butler. "Ask her to come here."

"There is only a few minutes to the train, sir," said Mr. Batts, looking at his

watch with an air of some reproof. "Indeed, if I was you, sir, I'd leave this alone, and go at once."

Our hero had a special dislike to the dignified Mr. Batts, which dated from the contemptuous manner in which that official had received his designation of "a fellow like that."

"You are very impertinent," he said angrily. "Do as I tell you."

"I take no orders from you, please, sir. But I can only tell you this, the whole house is talking of your goings on; and by-and-by it will be the public."

Mr. Pringle was almost speechless at this freedom, and yet his whole soul was secretly pleased—flattered—at his name being associated with hers. Without answering he went to look for her, and found her in one of the innumerable little "morning-rooms," walking up and down angrily, as though she were trampling on and crushing flowers.

"I thought you were gone?" she said.

"I only wanted," he said, "to say 'Good-bye.' What is the matter, though? Have they been annoying you?"

"Annoying me!" she said. "But you cannot expect me to be in the most charming spirits, with the prospect before me."

"How do you mean?" he asked.

"You will miss your train," she said. "Never mind me. Go now."

"But I want to hear you tell me, now—quick. There is plenty of time."

"Understand, then, it will not be my fault. I cannot force you into the carriage."

"I shall probably be gone," she went on, "before you return."

"Gone!" he repeated.

"Yes," she answered; "you don't suppose that I shall stay here to receive the treatment that is in store for me, when you bring your wife back? I shall not wait to accept the mortification of defeat—linger on here, and endure the degradation of the airs of victory of one who once injured me so deeply, and now seeks opportunity of repeating the injury. No, I shall take the more dignified course—I shall go first. But it is hard, and I have done nothing to deserve it."

"But you are not to go. And she is not coming here. She is ill. She will do very well where she is."

"Oh, you say this; but you are powerless in the matter. You will have to return with her."

"What a contempt you have for me," he answered bitterly; "and how you delight in showing it."

"What! Not gone yet! You have lost the train!" And Mr. Brookfield was standing before them.

Adelaide looked at him defiantly and even triumphantly.

"Go," she said. "It is not I that detain you, recollect."

He hurried away, Mr. Brookfield following him.

"This is most extraordinary," he said; "you should, really—even for the sake of humanity and decency——"

Mr. Pringle could not resist saying:

"I understand. Your interference is quite intelligible. But don't trouble yourself about me, please."

He got into the carriage, and the coachman drove off rapidly. But it was in vain. As they came to the bridge he pulled up his horses.

"There she goes, sir," he said.

Mr. Pringle felt his cheeks glow.

"Always bringing me worry of some sort," he said to himself. But he could not bring himself to drive back and face the crowd at home. There was no other train that day, but he said he would take the down train, which was shortly due. "And," he added, "you needn't say anything, you know, of my having missed the train."

"That will be hard not to do if I'm asked, sir."

"You're all ready enough with excuses when it's your own affair," said Mr. Pringle, as he walked away.

The man looked after him with no very friendly expression. Already Mr. Pringle was disliked in the establishment.

Yet almost as soon as the carriage had driven away, Adelaide, left alone, stamped impatiently on the floor.

"I did not mean it. But it was too much. I was driven to it! As I stand here, I never intended departing from that fixed purpose of letting events take their own course. But what can I do? Oh, it is beginning to break upon me that he does love her! I see it coming! She is destined to ruin me in every way. Even now it is drawing on; but let her take care. I have been passive as yet; but I cannot endure this perpetual misconception from him; if he will think the worst of me, the time has come when I must protect myself."



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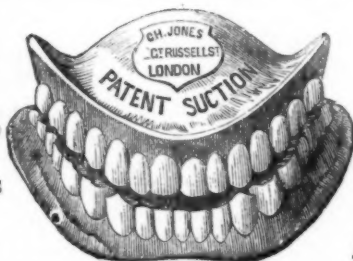
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